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Allan Brotsky Obituary

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ALLAN BROTSKY

1920 - 2015 ▾ Obituary ▸ Condolences



Allan Brotsky

July 27, 1920 - November 30, 2015

Allan Brotsky, a life-long fighter for the left, who had a distinguished career as a labor and constitutional law attorney and then became a law professor, died peacefully in his apartment at the age of 95 on November 30, 2015 with family members present. Allan was born on July 27, 1920. He was raised with his two older siblings by a divorced mother in Detroit, Michigan. In 1931, the family left for Denver, Colorado, at the height of the Great Depression. After Allan completed high school and a year at Colorado University, his family continued its westward migration to Los Angeles in 1936. While in Los Angeles, Allan was part of the first successful drive to unionize California's canneries. After graduating from [UCLA](#) with highest honors in 1939, Allan went east to Columbia Law School, where he graduated in 1942. At law school, he served on the Columbia Law Review.

Entering the US [Army](#) promptly after his graduation from law school, Allan served in both the Signal Corps and the Ordnance Department. When he received his honorable discharge three and one-half years later, it was as a Second Lieutenant.

In the fall of 1946, after his discharge from the Army, Allan married his beloved wife of 67 years, Muriel Hoffman, a resident of New York. They started their life together in New York, where Allan began his legal career as associate to the general counsel of the United Electrical Workers Union.

Both Allan and Muriel longed to live in California, so they moved to the Bay Area, living briefly in Berkeley and then permanently in San Francisco. Allan joined Vaughns & Berkley, an integrated, progressive law firm in Oakland, and then moved to Gladstein, Andersen, Resner and Sawyer, the firm which represented most of the CIO unions in the Bay Area as well as many of the Bay Area's radical organizations, including the Communist Party.

From 1947 through the 1950's, during the anti-communist hysteria of HUAC and the McCarthy commission, Allan and his colleagues represented individuals and organizations whose constitutional rights were being challenged: unions (such as the ILWU) which the CIO sought to expel as being communist-dominated, state college and university professors who were being discharged for refusing to sign loyalty oaths,

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longshoremen and seamen who were deemed subversive by unnamed informers, and many others who lost their jobs when they were subpoenaed by Congressional committees investigating left-wing organizations.

In the early 1960's, as part of the civil rights movement, Allan's labor focus moved to ending Jim Crow, that is, to integrating both unions and workplaces, and protecting the rights of immigrant farmworkers to organize. Later, as the Vietnam War escalated, Allan took on work defending draft resisters and war protestors, including those arrested for blocking military supply trains in Port Chicago. In 1967, he partnered with his long-time colleagues and best friend Frank McTernan at Garry, Dreyfus, McTernan, and Brotsky; among their clients were the Black Panther Party, Angela Davis, and Daniel Ellsberg.

Throughout his career, Allan championed the availability of good legal representation for those who needed it, regardless of their ability to pay. Many of his cases he handled pro bono, and he was once prosecuted (unsuccessfully) by the state bar for developing an innovative agreement by which union members would receive low-cost legal services. Always a mentor to younger attorneys, Allan was a mainstay in the San Francisco chapter of the National Lawyers Guild, serving as its president from 1963-1965. Many of his legal strategies, particularly in immigration cases, involved constitutional arguments that had never been tried before, including some that lost at trial but went on to appeal, and in which his legal position was ultimately vindicated by the Supreme Court of the United States. In 1979, Allan left general practice to focus once again on union work, becoming the West Coast and then National Counsel for the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association. At the same time, he pursued a new passion-teaching-becoming a Visiting and then Associate Professor at Golden Gate University School of Law in San Francisco. He was greatly loved by his students there, who benefited from his talent as a teacher and absorbed his passion for the underdog. In his honor, Golden Gate University School of Law established the Allan Brotsky Pro Bono Award, given annually to law students who continue Allan's tradition of pro bono work for the public interest.

Allan and his wife Muriel loved to travel, play tennis, and attend opera, symphony, and theater, often with their circle of close friends. They also delighted in watching their grandchildren grow up and were on the sidelines or in the auditorium for years of softball, basketball, and soccer games, music and dance performances, and school graduations.

Allan joined Muriel at Rhoda Goldman Plaza in 2013, prior to her death in January, 2014. Allan is survived by his daughters China (Dan Roth) and Ellen (Lew Williams), his son Daniel (Shawna Hartman), and beloved grandchildren Rachel, Rebecca, Leanne, Jenna, and Corey, all of whom loved him dearly.

A memorial service will be held in March 2016.
Donations in Allan's memory may be directed to Golden Gate University School of Law, 536 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94105 (<http://ggu.edu/>) with "Allan & Muriel Brotsky Pro Bono Award" in the memo line.

Published in San Francisco Chronicle from Jan. 7 to Jan. 10, 2016

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*"A first class human being and first
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6

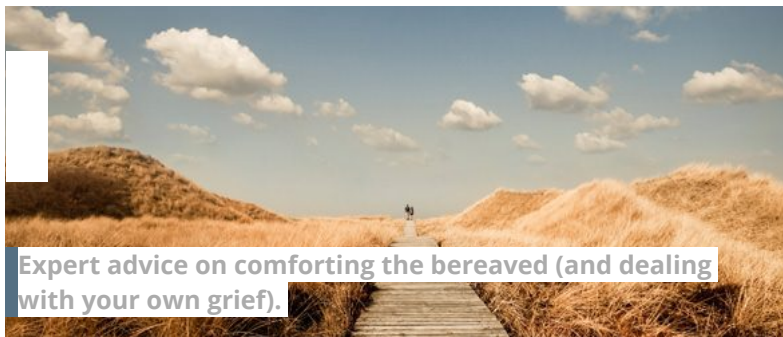


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